

Kessler, Ellen

From: Sen.Sharon.Erickson.Ropes@senate.mn
Sent: Thursday, July 23, 2009 12:09 PM
To: Strength, Stephanie - Washington, DC
Subject: USDA/RUS EIS for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project
Attachments: DOC026.PDF

Dear Ms. Strength:

I have attached a letter for you to consider regarding the USDA/RUS EIS for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project. I have also sent it in the mail.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sharon Erickson Ropes

Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes
Houston, Fillmore & Winona Counties
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St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-5649

SENATOR SHARON ERICKSON ROPES
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Phone: (651)296-5469
sen.sharon.erickson.ropes@senate.mn

July 23, 2009

Stephanie A. Strength
Environmental Protection Specialist/RD
1400 Independence Ave. SW Room # 2244
Washington, DC 20250-1571
stephanie.strength@usda.gov

Dear Ms. Strength:

I am writing you today to share my perspective on the USDA/RUS EIS for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project and ask that you take my comments into consideration as you go forward with your review process.

I have some concerns from an environmental and rural economic development perspective about the request made by Dairyland for Rural Utilities Services funding of the CapX2020 La Crosse Project. I believe that the United States Department of Agriculture should make an independent and detailed review of claims made by the project proponents in developing the environmental impact statement ("EIS") for the proposed project.

Also, I am concerned that any alternative route for the CapX2020 La Crosse Project could widen existing right of way through the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, affect migratory birds using the Mississippi Flyway, and negatively affect resources in the Mississippi River corridor. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has expressed concerns regarding impacts on the National Wildlife Refuge in a recent letter to the CapX2020 proponents dated May 9, 2009 and I would encourage you to review this letter as I share many of their concerns.

Furthermore, on behalf of constituents and to protect federal interests in natural resources, I respectfully request that the Rural Utilities Services ("RUS") provide an independent review of whether the CapX2020 La Crosse Project needs have been appropriately defined by project proponents and whether there might be alternatives to meet energy needs that would not impact the Mississippi River corridor bluff lands, scenic roads and National Wildlife Refuge. I believe there is merit in reviewing possible alternatives to the CapX2020 La Crosse Project and would encourage your organization to consider the following potential options in your review:

- Existing, planned and potential local generation in the Rochester and La Crosse areas to meet local reliability needs;
- Existing, newly built, and planned alternative transmission in both Minnesota and Wisconsin that can meet community reliability needs without crossing the Mississippi River and impacting federally protected resources; and
- Conservation, distributed generation and smart grid technology that can address peak energy needs in the Rochester and La Crosse areas and a further examination of the current peak needs of the region.



COMMITTEES: Vice Chair, Agriculture and Veterans Policy and Budget Division; Higher Education Policy and Budget Division; Health and Human Services Budget Division; Health, Housing, and Family Security



Senate
State of Minnesota

Hampton-Rochester-La Crosse 345 kV Transmission Improvement Project Scoping Report
February 2010

S-008-002

Your comment comment has been noted. Potential impacts to wildlife, vegetation, and wetlands will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

S-008-003

Your comment has been noted. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement will describe, in detail, project purpose and need. The justification document which has been accepted by the RUS is the Alternative Evaluation study which is available at:
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>.

S-008-004

Your comment has been noted. The criteria used to route the transmission line is described in the Macro Corridor Study which is available on the RUS website at:
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>. These criteria and routing process will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The project is still in the development and planning stages and the utilities have not yet permitted a route for the transmission line.

S-008-005

Next, given the potential connection of the La Crosse Project with other CapX2020 projects extending into South Dakota and North Dakota, I would request that the EIS analyze the degree to which the La Crosse Project will permit transmission of coal and lignite coal from the Dakotas, along with associated air emissions and global warming impacts.

S-008-006

Finally, the question of USDA funding of the CapX2020 La Crosse Project raises concerns about the best ways to utilize scarce federal resources and support rural economic development. Although the amount of funding sought is not specifically stated in the Applicant's Alternatives Evaluation Study, if the RUS is being asked to finance Dairyland's 11 percent ownership interest in the La Crosse Project, the federal cost could be up to \$47 million in 2007 dollars.

S-008-007

In considering the "no-build" option, I believe the EIS should also consider the costs and local economic benefits of the La Crosse Project ultra high voltage transmission line in comparison to investments targeted to support community-based renewable energy development. It is possible that other federal infrastructure investments may have greater potential to provide local jobs and multiply benefits throughout rural economies.

I appreciate you taking my comments and concerns regarding the CapX2020 La Crosse Project into consideration as you prepare to conduct the oversight process.

Sincerely,



Sharon Erickson Ropes
State Senator District 31

S-008-005

Your comment has been noted. Due to the transmission grid's interconnected nature as well as to electricity's nature - it's generally difficult to identify a specific source of electricity on the grid.

The proposed CapX2020 transmission lines will serve the region's expected growth and help begin to meet Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard (RES), which requires utilities to deliver 25 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2025 (Xcel Energy is mandated to deliver 30 percent by 2020, with 25 percent from wind). Most of that energy comes from wind turbines.

Cumulative Impacts will be one of the topics addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

~~SHARON ERICKSON ROPES, STATE SENATOR DISTRICT 31, REQUESTS THAT THE EIS ANALYZE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE LA CROSSE PROJECT WILL PERMIT TRANSMISSION OF COAL AND LIGNITE COAL FROM THE DAKOTAS, ALONG WITH ASSOCIATED AIR EMISSIONS AND GLOBAL WARMING IMPACTS.~~

S-008-007

Your comment has been noted. Alternatives to the project will be addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.